

Land Development Services

This CAPS is comprised of the Offices of Site Development and Building Code Services.

► Agency Mission

The mission of Land Development Services (LDS) is to serve the community by enforcing land development and building construction regulations. As empowered, responsive and well-trained staff, we achieve this by providing efficient and effective services, customer education and guidance, and consistent and accurate information.

► Trends/Issues

Background

Established in 1999 as part of the consolidation of several agencies into the new Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES), LDS enforces public safety standards, protects the environment, and oversees the development of sound infrastructure to support the community.

LDS is comprised of the Offices of Site Development Services (OSDS) and Building Code Services (OBCS). OSDS carries out its part of the LDS mission by reviewing all site and subdivision plans and inspecting site development; OBCS is responsible for the plan review, permitting and inspection of new and existing buildings. The OBCS Office Director also serves as the Fairfax County Building Official as defined by the Code of Virginia. In addition, LDS, in conjunction with the DPWES Training Center, provides technical training and conducts customer outreach programs to help property owners, builders, and contractors meet land development and building code regulations. The individual CAPS for LDS include: Building Inspections; Building Plan Review and Permit Processing; Site Inspections and Enforcement; Site Plan Review and Processing; and Forest Integrated Pest Management.

The establishment of LDS as a cross-office line of business has offered an opportunity for greater delegation of duties, flexibility, and involvement of all staff in leadership work. In addition, the combination of these two construction-related cost centers into one agency allows them to pool resources and enhance coordination and communications, thereby improving plan review, permit issuance, inspections, and other services provided to private and corporate citizens and the entire community.

Customers

The LDS client base encompasses all individuals and entities in any way connected with and/or affected by the construction process, from the individual homeowner building and/or financing a home improvement project to the engineer, architect, or wide-scale developer of hi-rise commercial buildings.

Key Accomplishments

Identified below are key accomplishments for LDS. But the most descriptive acknowledgement of where LDS has been and is going has been through its expansion from telephone and paper based customer services to technological, Web-based services.

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As an innovator in service delivery, LDS was one of the first County agencies to have its own home page. An interdivisional team, themselves learning brand new web software, began the task of designing a web page and converting brochures, forms and, later, policies, to web-readable format.

This simple beginning took the agency to a new era where snail mail and faxes gave way to guiding customers to the internet and to the DEM web page to quickly access information needed to ensure that construction would be performed in accordance with current codes and policies.

Today, that simple provision of printable information has given way to various interactive capabilities - for example, fee estimates, structural and energy conservation calculations - on what is now the LDS portion of the DPWES Web page.

Since 1997, other key accomplishments for LDS have included:

- Enhancement of the plan review process by development of the Expedited Building Plan Review (EBPR) and Designated Plans Examiner (DPE) Programs for which the agency received awards, respectively, a Virginia Municipal League Presidential Award in 1999 and a "Streamlining Achievement Award" in 2000 by the National Conference of States on Building Codes and Standards, Inc.
- Establishment of a Revitalization Resource Center and implementation of other programs to assist customers and expedite the review of projects in commercial revitalization districts.
- Conversion of inspectors' hand-held computer terminals to laptop technology.
- Expansion of the multi-tasking capabilities of site and building inspectors through cross-certifications and cross-training as seen in the OBCS Master Inspector and OSDS Bond Release Programs.
- Establishment of the Countywide Master File program to enable the utilization of one set of plans for identical house models in different developments in the County.
- Implementation of various streamlining initiatives for which the agency was awarded several 2000 "Streamlining Achievement Awards" by the National Conference of States on Building Codes and Standards, Inc. under their "Streamlining the Nation's Building Regulatory Process" Program.
- Development of a vision for streamlining our processes using technology which, ultimately, will:
 - create a "virtual one-stop shop" for certain projects;
 - allow electronic, paperless submission and on-screen review of all construction documents;
 - provide access to all site-specific information to private-sector clients and the general public.

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- Reorganization of OSDS in FY 2000 based on input from employees, key industry and environmental groups, and management analysis of changes.

Features of the new organization include consolidation of site plan review functions from four divisions into two; the creation of customer advocacy positions; expanded code maintenance capabilities; enhanced expertise in the area of erosion and sediment control; and creation of a single construction plan intake group. In keeping with overall department strategies, the OSDS reorganization has resulted in the elimination of management layers, conversion of management positions into review and inspection positions, greater opportunities for cross-training, and delegation of authority to the lowest practical level. Staff is continuing to monitor the impact of the new features on the development process and work environment, and customers will be surveyed in the coming months to identify opportunities for improvement.

- Implementation of the site and subdivision component of LDSnet. LDSnet provides the user with the capability to access and view information stored in the Fairfax County Land Development System (LDS) for zoning applications (Zoning and Planning System – ZAPS) and site/construction plans (Plans and Waivers System – PAWS). LDSnet is accessed from the Fairfax County Information Web.

Current, On-going Initiatives

- Environmental protection through the implementation of the Stormwater and Erosion and Sedimentation Control Recommendations and Tree Preservation Recommendations of the In-fill and Residential Development Report Study.

The In-fill and Residential Development Study report was the culmination of a joint staff and public partnership to identify areas where In-fill development could be improved through implementation of specific recommendations. The report was recommended for approval by the Planning Commission and subsequently endorsed by the Board of Supervisors. Staff is currently working on implementing the recommendations of the study.

- Promotion and enhancement of public safety through the augmentation of the agency's accredited Training Academy to provide comprehensive, technical training to plan and site reviewers, permit technicians and inspectors, as well as industry representatives and other customers.

The VUSBC requires localities to remit 1.0 percent of all building permit fees to the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to support training programs of the Virginia Building Code Academy. Localities that maintain a DHCD-accredited Academy are exempt from this requirement which, for FY 2001, would have equated to \$141,119. In addition to designing and providing instructors for classes addressing codes currently in effect, LDS has recruited outside trainers from nationally recognized model code organizations to conduct classes in codes not currently mandated in Virginia but expected to be adopted early next year. The agency has also addressed other areas of concern – for example, environmental control issues – by the development and implementation of various comprehensive training programs for inspectors and industry personnel.

These initiatives will facilitate the successful transition from the current regional codes to the international model building codes anticipated for FY 2002 and will enable staff to address increasingly complex development issues (environmental concerns, soils, engineered fills, steep slopes, in-fill construction, design, etc.)

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- Expansion and improvement of the scope and quality of services provided by public counter and plan review staff.

In early 2001, a consultant, the Engineers and Surveyors Institute (ESI), conducted a series of forums that brought together LDS and other County staff and customers from all areas of the construction process. As a result of this effort, numerous teams of customers working with LDS employees have been created to propose and/or implement improvements. Among the suggestions are co-location of review agencies, creation of a super-technician who would be capable of addressing cross-agency issues, and expansion of the Plans and Waiver System (PAWS) to allow all agencies involved to enter and retrieve data.

- Improving staff access to technical resources.

LDS has provided staff with fingertip access to various codes, standards and engineering calculation programs. In the field, inspectors' laptops are loaded with most of the codes that they enforce. In the office, inspectors are able to plug into the agency's Local Area Network at their workstations and access most Code-referenced standards. The agency's most recent purchase of a Web-Based subscription service allows instant purchase of standards not currently in the agency's technical library but required for enforcement purposes. This technical access has been provided to other areas of DPWES as well as outside agencies including Fire and Rescue.

- Initiation of a comprehensive in-service training program.

In FY 2001, OBCS Division Directors set aside one hour each Friday morning to provide staff with training that covers the gamut from customer service and technical and cross training to career/professional advancement opportunities. Sessions on team building, goals development, etc. are also offered. Many of these sessions are of such general interest and/or immediacy that they are open not only to other LDS/DPWES staff but staff from other agencies – Zoning, Transportation, etc. – as well.

External Events Affecting the Agency

- The economic downturn has begun to impact the land development and construction industries and has somewhat reduced the level of construction activities, as well as revenues, for the fiscal year just ended.
- Although this trend has been reflected in new plan submissions, LDS staff continue to remain very busy with approved projects under construction and plans already in the pipeline.
- Our customers' expectations for further increases in speed of reviews and utilization of the latest technology to make our services available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week continue to grow.
- Our greatest – and key – challenge here will be to meet those expectations while continuing to carry out our mandate to ensure safe construction in Fairfax County.

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- Both the Federal and State governments are considering adoption of new lead regulations. Additionally, in recent years the State has granted local jurisdictions the right to impose radon restrictions. (In Fairfax County, the Board of Supervisors has embraced this concept, though no actual regulations have yet been adopted.) The state also is considering energy conservation code changes and the adoption of more stringent Chesapeake Bay and Wetlands Regulations. And, finally, DHCD staff are currently drafting language to adopt the new 2000 International Building codes into the VUSBC.

As the State-mandated enforcer of these codes, sometimes in concert with other County and State agencies, LDS will be impacted and influenced by whatever is adopted.

The Future

The biggest, most important initiative for the future is the e-permitting system currently being designed by a team of stakeholders within and outside the County. In 2000, OBCS sponsored the Fairfax County Forum on Technology for Streamlining Land Development and Permit Processes which brought together nearly 80 construction industry stake-holders representing builders, developers, contractors, regulators from Federal, State and local governments, as well as permit software developers and research and development institutions. The Forum explored the feasibility of developing and installing in Fairfax County, as a flagship site, a model permitting system which incorporates the most advanced software products.

In addition to this initiative, LDS anticipates the following:

- Continued revitalization initiatives as build-out continues, environmental focus heightens, and in-fill construction depletes all remaining undeveloped sites.
- Increased focus on regulatory review to streamline code requirements and processes.
- Development/enhancement of leadership and management skills of all LDS staff in line with DPWES guiding principles to empower staff to make decisions at the lowest possible level.
- Continued expansion of participation by clients in the Peer Review and Designated Plans Examiner programs.
- Exploration of the possibilities for more public-private partnerships to enhance services.
- Implementation of improvements to the Proffer Tracking Systems.
- Leveraging of computer technology, such as Web applications, GIS and imaging to further improve services.
- Transition of laptop to wireless technology which will allow instantaneous mainframe updates and on-site printing of, for example, code requirements, inspection results, notices of violation, etc., thereby enhancing the agency's code enforcement efforts.

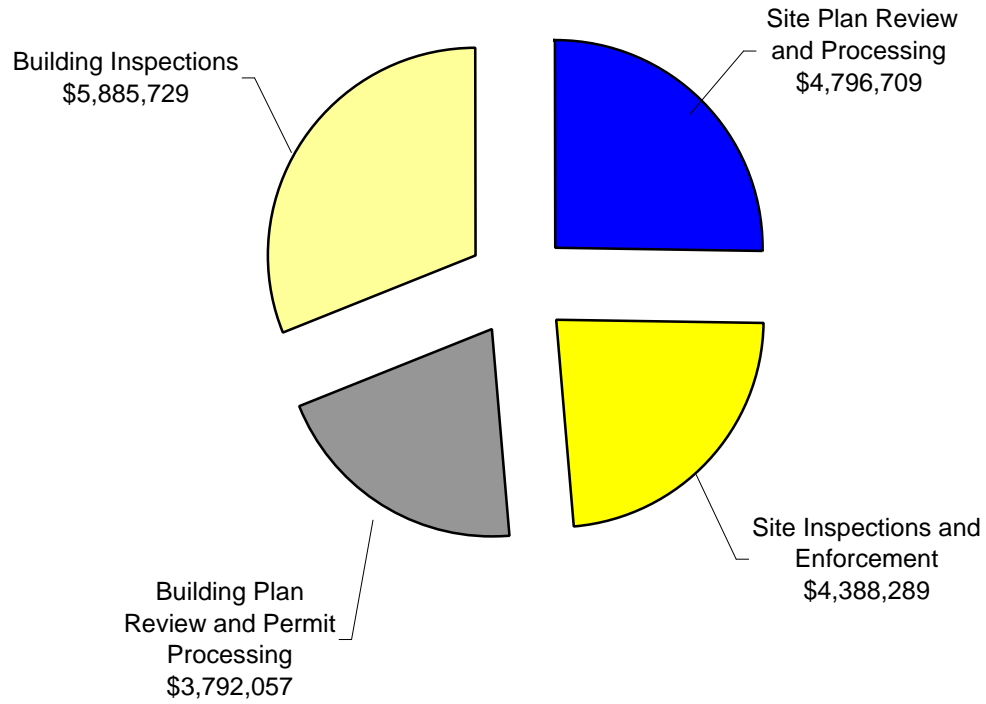
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► Summary of All Agency CAPS

CAPS Number	CAPS Title	CAPS Net Cost	CAPS Number of Positions/SYE
31-01	Site Plan Review and Processing	(\$1,234,168)	70/69.5
31-02	Site Inspections and Enforcement	\$86,558	71/68
31-03	Building Plan Review and Permit Processing	(\$3,936,114)	72/72.5
31-04	Building Inspections	(\$2,814,082)	95/98
TOTAL Agency		(\$7,897,806)	308/308

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Total FY 2002 Adopted Budget Expenditures = \$18,862,784

Total FY 2002 Adopted Budget Net Cost = (\$7,897,806)